

An address of the Congress to the inhabitants of the United States of America

AN ADDRESS OF THE CONGRESS TO THE Inhabitants of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA.

Friends and Countrymen, **THREE** years have now passed away since the commencement of the present war, a war without parallel in the annals of mankind. It hath displayed a spectacle the most solemn that can possibly be exhibited. On one side, we behold fraud and violence labouring in the service of despotism, on the other, virtue and fortitude supporting and establishing the rights of human nature.

You cannot but remember how reluctantly we were dragged into this arduous contest, and how repeatedly, with the earnestness of humble entreaty, we supplicated a redress of our grievances from him who ought to have been the father of his people. In vain did we implore his protection, in vain appeal to the justice, the generosity, of Englishmen---- of men who had been the guardians, the asserters and vindicators of liberty, through a succession of ages; men who, with their swords, had established a firm barrier of freedom, and cemented it with the blood of heroes. Every effort was vain; for, even whilst we were prostrated at the foot of the throne that fatal blow was struck which hath separated us for ever. Thus spurned, contemned, insulted, thus driven by our enemies into measures which our souls abhorred, we made a solemn appeal to the tribunal of unerring wisdom and justice, to that Almighty Ruler of Princes, whose kingdom is over all.

We were then quite defenceless---without arms, without ammunition, without clothing, without ships, without money, without officers skilled in war, with no other reliance but the bravery of our people, and the justice of our cause. We had to contend with a nation great in arts and in arms, whose fleets covered the ocean, whose banners had waved in triumph through every quarter of the globe. However unequal this contest, our weakness

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was still farther increased by the enemies which America had nourished in her bosom. Thus exposed on the one hand, to external force and internal divisions, on the other, to be compelled to drink of the bitter cup of slavery, and to go sorrowing all our lives long in this sad alternative, we chose the former. To this alternative we were reduced by men who, had they been animated by one spark of generosity, would have disdained to take such mean advantage of our situation, or, had they paid the least regard to the rules of justice, would have considered with abhorrence a proposition to injure those who had faithfully fought their battles, and industriously contributed to rear the edifice of their glory.

But however great the injustice of our foes in commencing this war, it is by no means equal to the cruelty with which they have conducted it. The course of their armies is marked by rapine and devastation. Thousands, without distinction of age or sex, have been driven from their peaceful abodes, to encounter the rigours of inclement seasons; and the face of heaven hath been insulted by the wanton conflagration of defenceless towns. Their victories have been followed by the cool murder of men, no longer able to resist; and those who escaped from the first act of carnage have been exposed, by cold, hunger, and nakedness, to wear out a miserable existence in the tedious hours of confinement, or to become the destroyers of their countrymen, of their friends, perhaps, dreadful idea! of their parents or children. Nor was this the outrageous barbarity of an individual, but a system of deliberate malice, stamped with the concurrence of the British legislature, and sanctioned with all the formalities of law. Nay, determined to dissolve the closest bonds of society, they have stimulated servants to slay their masters in the peaceful hour of domestick security. And, as if all this were insufficient to stake their thirst of blood, the blood of brothers of unoffending brothers, they have excited the indians against us; and a General, who calls himself a Christian, a follower of the merciful Jesus, hath dared to proclaim to all the world his intention of letting loose against us whole hosts of savages, whose rule of warfare is promiscuous carnage, who rejoice to murder the infant smiling in its mother's arms, to inflict on their prisoners the most excruciating torments, and exhibit scenes of horror from which nature recoils.

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Were it possible, they would have added to this terrible system, for they have offered the inhabitants of these states to be exported by their merchants to the sickly, baneful climes of India, there to perish. An offer not accepted of, merely from the impracticability of carrying it into execution.

Notwithstanding these great provocations, we have treated such of them as fell into our hands with tenderness, and studiously endeavoured to alleviate the afflictions of their captivity. This conduct we have pursued so far as to be by them stigmatised with cowardice, and by our friends with folly. But our dependence was not upon man, it was upon him who hath commanded us to love our enemies, and to render good for evil. And what can be more wonderful than the manner of our deliverances? How often have we been reduced to distress, and yet been raised up? When the means to prosecute the war have been wanting to us, have not our foes themselves been rendered instrumental in producing them? This hath been done in such a variety of instances, so peculiarly marked almost by the direct interposition of Providence, that not to feel and acknowledge his protection would be the height of impious ingratitude.

At length that God of Battles, in whom was our trust, hath conducted us through the paths of danger and distress to the thresholds of security. It hath now become morally certain that, if we have courage to persevere, we shall establish our liberties and independence. The haughty Prince who spurned us from his feet with contumely and disdain, and the parliament which proscribed us, how descend to offer terms of accommodation. Whilst in the full career of victory, they pulled off the mask, and avowed their intended despotism; but, having lavished in vain the blood and treasure of their subjects in pursuit of this execrable purpose, they now endeavour to ensnare us with the insidious offers of peace. They would seduce you into a dependence, which necessarily, inevitably leads to the most humiliating slavery. And, do they believe that you will accept these fatal terms? Because you have suffered the distresses of war, do they suppose that you will basely lick the dust before the feet of your destroyer? Can there be an American so lost to the feelings which

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adorn human nature? To the generous price, the elevation, the dignity of freedom! Is there a man who would not abhor a dependence upon those who have deluged his country in the blood of its inhabitants? We cannot suppose this, neither is it possible that they themselves can expect to make many converts. What then is their intention? Is it not to lull you with the fallacious hopes of peace, until they can assemble new armies to prosecute their nefarious designs? If this is not the case, why do they strain every nerve to levy men throughout their islands? Why do they meanly court each little tyrant of Europe to sell them his unhappy slaves? Why do they continue to imbitter the minds of the savages against you? Surely this is not the way to conciliate the affections of America. Be not therefore deceived. You have still to expect one severe conflict. Your foreign alliances, though they secure your independence, cannot secure your country from desolation, your habitations from plunder, your wives from insult or violation, nor your children from butchery. Foiled in their principal design, you must expect to feel the rage of disappointed ambition. Arise then! to your tents! and gird you for the battle. It is time to turn the headlong current of vengeance upon the head of the destroyer. They have filled up the measure of their abominations; and, like ripe fruit, must soon drop from the tree. Although much is done, yet much remains to do. Expect not peace whilst any corner of America is in possession of your foes. You must drive them away from this land of promise, a land flowing indeed with milk and honey. Your brethren at the extremities of the continent already implore your friendship and protection. It is your duty to grant their request. They hunger and thirst after liberty. Be it yours to dispense to them the heavenly gift. And what is there now to prevent it?

After the unremitted efforts of our enemies, we are stronger than before; nor can the wicked emissaries who so assiduously labour to promote their cause point out any one reason to suppose that we shall not receive daily accessions of strength. They tell you, it is true, that your money is of no value, and your debts so enormous they can never be paid. But we tell you, that if Britain prosecutes the war another campaign, that single campaign will cost her more than we have hitherto expended. And yet these men would

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prevail upon you to take up that immense load, and for it to sacrifice your dearest rights; for, surely, there is no man so absurd as to suppose, that the least shadow of liberty can be preserved in a dependent connexion with Great Britain. From the nature of the thing, it is evident that the only security you could obtain would be the justice and moderation of a Parliament who have sold the rights of their own constituents; and this slender security is still farther weakened, by the consideration that it was pledged to rebels (as they unjustly call the good people of their State) with whom they think they are not bound to keep faith by any law whatsoever. Thus would you be cast bound among men, whose minds (by your virtuous resistance) have been sharpened to the keenest edge of revenge. Thus would your children, and your childrens children, be by you forced to a participation in all their debts, their wars, their luxuries, and their crimes. And this mad, this impious system, they would lead you to adopt, because of the derangement of your finances.

It becomes you deeply to reflect on this subject. Is there a country on earth which hath such resources for the payment of her debts as America? Such an extensive territory? So fertile, so blessed in its climate and productions? Surely there is none. Neither is there any to which the wife Europeans will sooner confide their property. What then are the reasons that your money hath depreciated? Because no taxes have been imposed to carry on the war. Because your commerce hath been interrupted by your enemies fleets. Because their armies have ravages and desolated a part of your country. Because their agents have villainously conterfeited your bills. Because extortioners among you, inflamed with the lust of gain, have added to the price of every article of life. And because weak men have been artfully led to believe that it is of no value. How is this dangerous disease to be remedied? Let those among you, who have leisure and opportunity, collect the monies which individuals in their neighbourhood are desirous of placing in the publick funds. Let the several legislatures sink their respective emissions, that so, there being but one kind of bills, there may be less danger of counterfeits. Refrain a little while from purchasing those things which are not absolutely necessary, that so those who have engrossed commodities may suffer (as they deservedly will) the loss of their ill-gotten hoards, by

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reason of the commerce with foreign nations, which their fleets will protect. Above all, bring forward your armies into the field. Trust not to appearance of peace or safety. Be assured, that, unless you persevere, you will be exposed to every species of barbarity. But if you exert the means of defence which God and nature have given you, the time will soon arrive when every man shall sit under his own vine, and under his own fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.

The sweets of a free commerce with every part of the earth will soon reimburse you for all the losses you have sustained, The full tide of wealth will flow in upon your shores, free from the arbitrary impositions of those whose interest, and whose declared policy, it was to check your growth. Your interests will be fostered and nourished by governments that derive their power from your grant, and will therefore be obliged, by the influence of cogent necessity, to exert it in your favour.

It is to obtain these things that we call for your strenuous, unremitted exertions. Yet do not believe that you have been, or can be saved, merely by your own strength. No! it is by the assistance of Heaven, and this you must assiduously cultivate, by acts which Heaven approves. Thus shall the power and the happiness of these sovereign, free, and independent states, founded on the virtue of their citizens, increase, extend, and endure, until the Almighty shall blot out all the empires of the earth. *By order of Congress*, **HENRY LAURENS**, President.

IN CONGRESS, *May 9, 1778.*

RESOLVED, that it be recommended to Ministers of the Gospel, of all denominations, to read, or cause to be read, immediately after divine service, the above address to the inhabitants of the United States of America, in their respective churches and chapels, and other places of religious worship. *Published by order of Congress*, **CHARLES THOMSON**, Secretary.

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